

Q. Thank you very much.
The President. Enjoyed it.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 1:49 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India;

A.Q. Khan, former head of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program; and former Secretary of State Colin L. Powell. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 23. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Remarks Following a Cabinet Meeting and an Exchange With Reporters *February 23, 2006*

The President. Thank you all for coming. My Cabinet just met to get a report from Fran Townsend about the lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina. On September the 6th, I asked Fran to conduct a thorough review of the Federal response to Katrina and to make recommendations about how we can better respond in the future. I wasn't satisfied with the Federal response. Fran and her team produced a lessons-learned document, and she just briefed the Cabinet about lessons learned.

I reminded our Cabinet that hurricane season begins in June and that we will be tracking the implementations of the recommendations in this report. I want to thank her for her report. It's a good work. We will learn from the lessons of the past to better protect the American people.

We have made a strong commitment to people in the gulf coast, and we will honor that commitment as well. The report helps us anticipate how to better respond to future disasters. In the meantime, our commitment to rebuild and help rebuild Mississippi and Louisiana is ongoing and robust.

I'll be glad to answer some questions. Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press]. Two questions. You're the first questioner.

Bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samarra

Q. Mr. President, dozens of Sunni mosques have been attacked and scores of people have been killed after the bombing

of the Golden Mosque. How serious is the danger of a civil war in Iraq?

The President. First of all, the people of the United States strongly condemn the destruction of the Golden Mosque. We believe in freedom to worship. And I understand the consternation and concern of Iraqi Shi'as when they see this most holy site wantonly destroyed.

I appreciate very much the leaders from all aspects of Iraqi society that have stood up and urged for there to be calm. They recognize two things—one, the Iraqi people want to live in a democracy. After all, 11 million people voted in the last election. In other words, given a choice of whether or not they want democracy or a different form of government, millions of people showed up to vote, making a clear statement to the Iraqi authorities as well as to the people of the world—they want democracy.

Secondly, the voices of reason from all aspects of Iraqi life understand that this bombing is intended to create civil strife, that the act was a evil act. The destruction of a holy site is a political act intending to create strife. And so I'm pleased with the voices of reason that have spoken out. And we will continue to work with those voices of reason to enable Iraq to continue on the path of a democracy that unites people and doesn't divide them.

Finally, I do want to assure the Iraqi people that the U.S. Government is serious

in our commitment in helping to rebuild that holy site. We understand its importance to Iraqi society, and we want to stand side by side with the Government in making sure that beautiful dome is restored.

Caren [Caren Bohan, Reuters].

Dubai Ports World/Homeland Security

Q. Sir, do you wish you had known earlier about the Dubai Ports deal, and were you surprised by the controversy over it?

The President. The more people learn about the transaction that has been scrutinized and approved by my Government, the more they'll be comforted that our ports will be secure. Port security in the United States will be run by Customs—U.S. Customs—and the United States Coast Guard. The management of some ports, which heretofore has been managed by a foreign company, will be managed by another company from a foreign land. And so people don't need to worry about security. This deal wouldn't go forward if we were concerned about the security for the United States of America.

What I find interesting is that it's okay for a British company to manage some ports but not okay for a company from

a country that is also a valuable ally in the war on terror. The UAE has been a valuable partner in fighting the war on terror. A lot of goods are shipped from ports to the United States—managed by this company.

And again, I repeat to the American people, this wouldn't be going forward if we weren't certain that our ports would be secure. But I also want to remind folks that it's really important we not send mixed messages to friends and allies around the world as we combine—put together a coalition to fight this war on terror.

And so we'll continue to talk to people in Congress and explain clearly why the decision was made. Many of those doing the explanations are around this table, and I want to thank them for bringing a sense of calm to this issue, as people understand the logic of the decision.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:16 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks at a Reception for Congressional Candidate Chris Chocola in Mishawaka, Indiana *February 23, 2006*

Thank you all very much. Please be seated. Thanks for the warm welcome. I have grown to admire Chris Chocola a lot because he is a person who does in office what he said he would do during campaigns. He is a honest, decent, down-to-earth, practical man who deserves to be reelected to the United States Congress.

Chris is a rising star in the House of Representatives. And when you find a rising star, it makes a lot of sense to keep him serving you. So I want to thank you

all for recognizing talent when you see it. Thank you for backing this good man for his reelection. Thank you for coming today to give me a chance to say loud and clear, Chris is the right person for the Second Congressional District of Indiana.

And like me, he married well. [Laughter] It's great to see Sarah—and Caroline and Colin. You know, being in politics is hard on your family. But it sure does help when you, in my case, marry a good wife, and in Chris's case, marry a good wife too. And